

Message Text

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SUBJECT: LACK OF DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN ITALY

1. WHILE MOST OF NORTHERN EUROPE IS BAKING THROUGH THE CENTURY'S WORST DROUGHT SOUTHERN ITALY HAD CONSIDERABLY MORE RAIN THAN USUAL. SOME ESTIMATES PLACE RAINFALL AS MUCH AS 20 PERCENT AHEAD OF LAST YEAR. IT SEEMS LIKE THAT SHOULD BE ALL TO THE GOOD, BUT COMPLAINTS ARE HEARD THAT THE RAINS EITHER CAME TOO LATE, ALL AT ONCE, OR IN THE FORM OF HAIL. WHEN THEY FELL AT THE RIGHT TIME, AS THEY DID FOR PEACHES AND PLUMS, THEY CAUSED PROBLEMS OF OVER SUPPLY.

2. FARM INCOME IN THE MEZZOGIORNO ACCOUNTS FOR JUST UNDER 50 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL. RELATED PROCESSING AND EQUIPMENT INDUSTRIES ACCOUNT FOR A GOOD PART OF THE REST. IN SPITE OF THE GOI'S PLANS

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TO INDUSTRIALIZE THE SOUTH, THE MEZZOGIORNO LIVES ON AGRICULTURE. GOOD FORTUNE, OR THE LACK OF IT, IN FIELDS AND ORCHARDS IS TRANSLATED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY IN POLITICAL TERMS. WHEN PLUM GROWERS IN THE CAMPANIA FOUND THAT THE SIZE OF THEIR CROP HAD DRIVEN MARKET PRICES DOWN TO AN UNPROFITABLE LEVEL, THEY RETALIATED BY DUMPING TRUCKLOADS OF UNSALABLE PLUMS IN THE STREETS OF NAPLES.

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THE REGIONAL ASSOCIATION OF "COLTIVATORI DIRETTI" ASKED FOR 300

MILLION LIRE IN AID TO THOSE HARDEST HIT. THE CAMPANIA REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION HAS PROMISED 150 MILLION. IT IS A COMPROMISE WHICH MEETS THE "COLTIVATORI" ONLY HALF WAY BUT WHICH MAY BE AS MUCH OR MORE THAN INDIVIDUAL FARMERS EXPECTED.

3. THE PUGLIA REGION HAS BEEN HARDEST HIT BY THE BAD WEATHER. MOST OF ITALY'S HARD WHEAT PRODUCTION COMES FROM PUGLIA AND THE CROP HAS BEEN DAMAGED BY HAIL AND FLOODING. HARD WHEAT IS THE PREFERRED GRAIN FOR PASTA. THE BAD WEATHER WILL LIKELY BE REFLECTED IN THE RETAIL MARKET FOR PASTA. THE VINEYARDS HAVE ALSO SUFFERED FROM THE HARD RAINS AND IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ITALIAN WINE PRODUCTION WILL BE OFF 10 TO 15 PERCENT WITH RESPECT TO LAST YEAR. THE ONLY GOOD NEWS IS THAT IT'S BEEN AN EVEN WORSE YEAR FOR FRENCH WINE PRODUCTION AND THE THREAT OF A RENEWAL OF LAST

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YEARS "WINE WAR" IS SHARPLY DOWN.

4. INSTEAD, THIS YEAR IT'S THE "PEACH WAR." BOTH ITALY AND FRANCE HAVE HAD BUMPER CROPS OF PEACHES, BUT THE LIRA'S DEVALUATION HAS MADE THE ITALIAN FRUIT MORE COMPETITIVE. FRENCH GROWERS HAVE BLOCKED SHIPMENTS AND DESTROYED TONS OF ITALIAN PEACHES. COMING ON THE HEELS OF LAST YEAR'S WINE AFFAIR, THERE IS A STRONG AND GROWING SENSE HERE THAT THE FRENCH ARE NOT PLAYING FAIR AS REGARDS THE FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS WITHIN THE EEC. MOST OF THE PEACHES IN THE MEZZOGIORNO ARE GROWN IN THE CAMPANIA REGION.

5. THE CAMPANIA IS ALSO A MAJOR PRODUCER OF TOMATOES. THE PICTURE HERE IS A BIT BRIGHTER THAN IT MIGHT BE. AFTER LAST YEAR'S TERRIFYING OVER PRODUCTION ACREAGE HAS FALLEN AN ESTIMATED 20 PERCENT AND STOCKS ARE DOWN TO NORMAL LEVELS. PRICES ARE HOLDING AT WELL ABOVE THE OFFICIAL SUPPORT LEVELS AND THE ONLY ISSUE CURRENTLY EFFECTING THE TOMATO INDUSTRY ARE STRIKES BY SOME 2500 TO 3000 UNEMPLOYED CANNERY WORKERS LAID OFF BY UNDERCAPITALIZED PACKERS WHO WERE BADLY BURNED IN LAST YEAR'S MARKET.

6. THE MESSAGE REALLY IS THAT THE UNUSUAL WEATHER CONDITIONS ARE NOT GOING TO CAUSE ANY PARTICULAR DEPARTURE FROM THE USUAL PATTERN OF AGRICULTURALLY RELATED POLITICAL ACTIVITY. AS USUAL,

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SOME FARMERS WILL DO WELL THIS YEAR AND SOME POORLY. ALSO AS USUAL, THE SMALL FARMERS ARE GOING TO FEEL THE PAIN OF AN UN-PROFITABLE CROP MORE INTENSELY AND THIS SHOULD HELP THE RECRUITING EFFORTS OF THE "COLTIVATORI DIRETTI" ORGANIZATIONS. PUGLIA AND CAMPANIA WILL BE THE FOCAL POINTS OF PUBLIC AGITATION BY THE FARMERS, WHO ARE BETTER ORGANIZED AND MORE AWARE OF THEIR MUSCLE IN THESE ZONES. ALL IN ALL THE RESULT OF THE

STRIKING ABUNDANCE OF RAIN IN THE MIDST OF EVERYONE ELSE'S DROUGHT
IS GOING TO BE BUSINESS AS USUAL IN THE MEZZOGIORNO. COLANTONIO

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